

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 5181

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IT, VT

SUBJECT: ITALIAN BISHOPS COMMENT ON CURRENT POLITICAL SCENE

1. THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE HELD ITS QUARTERLY MEETING MARCH 21-26. THE COMMUNIQUE ISSUED ON MARCH 28 PROVIDES AN OUTLINE OF, AND BRIEF COMMENTARY ON , THE TOPICS DISCUSSED (VIOLENCE, UNEMPLOYMENT, ABORTION, REVISION OF CONCORDAT). ITS TONE CONTRASTS SUBSTANTIALLY WITH PREVIOUS COMMUNIQUE IN THAT IT AVOIDS STRIDENT ATTACKS OR APPEALS TO CRUSADES.

2. THE BISHOPS SPECIFICALLY:

A. CALL FOR SERIOUS EFFORT TO EXAMINE AND REMOVE CAUSES OF CURRENT RESURGENCE OF VIOLENCE AND INVITE EVERYONE TO COLLABORATE IN "REAL PACIFICATION" OF COUNTRY.  
B. OFFER THEIR WILLINGNESS TO MAKE A PROPER CONTRIBUTION TO THE REVIOSON OF THE CONCORDAT. IN THE INTEREST OF "RELIGIOUS PEACE" AND HEALTHY CHURCH/ STATE RELATIONS.  
C. EXPRESS ENCOURAGEMENT AT FACT THAT CATHOLIC ASSOCIATIONS AND MOVEMENTS HAVE  
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UNDERTAKEN COURAGEOUS PUBLIC ACTION / IN DEFENSE OF LIFE" AND AGAINST ABORTION.

3. COMMENT. THE COMMUNIQUE, WHOSE CONTENTS, AS USUAL, HAVE BEEN CLOSELY COORDINATED WITH THE VATICAN SECRETARIAT OF STATE, IS NOTABLE IN TWO RESPECTS. FIRST, ITS TONE IS CONCILIATORY AND

MAY BE TAKEN AS THE CHURCH'S CONTRIBUTION IN SUPPORT OF PRIME MINISTER ANDREOTTI'S DELICATE POLITICAL POSTURE. (A USUALLY RELIABLE VATICAN OBSERVER HAS TOLD US THAT PRIME MINISTER ANDREOTTI HAD DISCREETLY APPEALED FOR THE BISHOPS' UNDERSTANDING.) SECOND, IT REFLECTS VATICAN AND CHURCH ASSESSMENT THAT ON THE TWO KEY CHURCH-STATE ISSUES, ABORTION AND REVISION OF THE CONCORDAT, THE CONTINUATION OF THE ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT PROVIDES THE MOST FAVORABLE CIRCUMSTANCES FOR PROTECTING CHURCH INTERESTS.

4. ON THE QUESTION OF ABORTION, THE CHURCH'S VIGOROUS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE DRAFT PASSED BY THE CHAMBER HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE AND THE BISHOP'S STATMENTS REFLECT A DECISION NOT TO EXACERBATE EXISTING FAVORABLE POLITICAL SITUATION, ON THE EVE OF FINAL READING OF THE LEGISLATION BY THE SENATE COMMITTEES OF JUSTICE AND HEALTH SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 31. IN THE LAST FORTNIGHT, CONSIDERABLE CONSENSUS HAS DEVELOPED (PROBABLY WITH QUIET PROMPTINGS BY THE GOI) WITHIN THE SENATE FOR AMENDING THE LEGISLATION. THE EFFORT HAS BEEN LED BY A NUMBER OF CATHOLIC SENATORS WHO WERE ETECTED IN THE PCI LISTS IN 1976. IT HAS THE SUPPORT OF VARIOUS INDEPENDENTS, INCLUDING SOME LAY SENATORS WHO HAVE ANNOUNCED THAT THEY WOULD VOTE AGAINST THE BILL ON THE BASIS OF CONSCIENCE. THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, PERCEIVING THIS CHANGE, ACCNOU NCED THIS WEEK THAT THEY ARE WILLING  
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TO SEEK "UNDERSTANDINGS" FOR IMPROVING THE BILL. BEHIND ALL THESE ACTIVITIES LOOMS THE DESIRE OF THE DC AND THE CHURCH TO AVOID A POLITICAL CRISIS OVER ABORTION WHICH MIGHT BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT AND ALSO TO AVOID RECOURSE TO A POPULAR REFENCUM WHICH WOULD POLARIZE PUBLIZ OPINION.

5. THE CONCILIATORY TONE OF THE CONCORDAT REFLECTS AN UNPRECEDENTED EFFORT ON PART OF THE VATICAN. SINCE SOME CONSERVATIVE BISHOPS HAD EXPRESSED APPREHENSION THAT THE VATICAN WOULD YIELD TOO MUCH (PARTICULARLY ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND ON GOMENMENTAL SUBSIDIES TO CHURCH-RUN ENTITIES), IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE REVISION OF THE CONCORDAT, POPE PAUL DESPATCHED FOREIGN MINISTE

CASAROLI TO GIVE THE COUNCIL A PERSONAL BRIEFINO ON THE STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS.GARDNER

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## Message Attributes

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